Design Course

Sequential Storytelling

Comics and Graphic Novels

by
Pranisha Shrestha and Prof. Phani Tetali
IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:
https://www.dsource.in/course/sequential-storytelling

1. Introduction
2. A Brief History and Different Mediums
3. Key Fundamentals
4. Materials Used
5. Technological Requirements
6. Getting Your Work Published
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Introduction

Sequential art is an art form, which uses series of images as a means of communication. This can be with or without the support of words. It is one of the current popular arts for creative expression dealing with arrangement of images and words to narrate the idea. The best-known examples of sequential art are comic strips, comic books and graphic novels.

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A Brief History and Different Mediums

The term sequential art was coined first by the comic artist **Will Eisner**. He analyzed this form of art through different elements of art such as design, layout, drawing, caricature and writing. But the existence of sequential art has been discovered way before it was coined by the modern era.

Prehistoric Cave and Wall Paintings
Considered an ancient form of art, sequential art is known to exist and practiced through cave paintings, depicting the then existing tribesmen's way of life. Egyptian wall art and paintings is also a landmark for exercising sequential art style. They mostly depicted their deities and aristocrats of their time.

(Fig.1) Bhimbetka Rock Painting.

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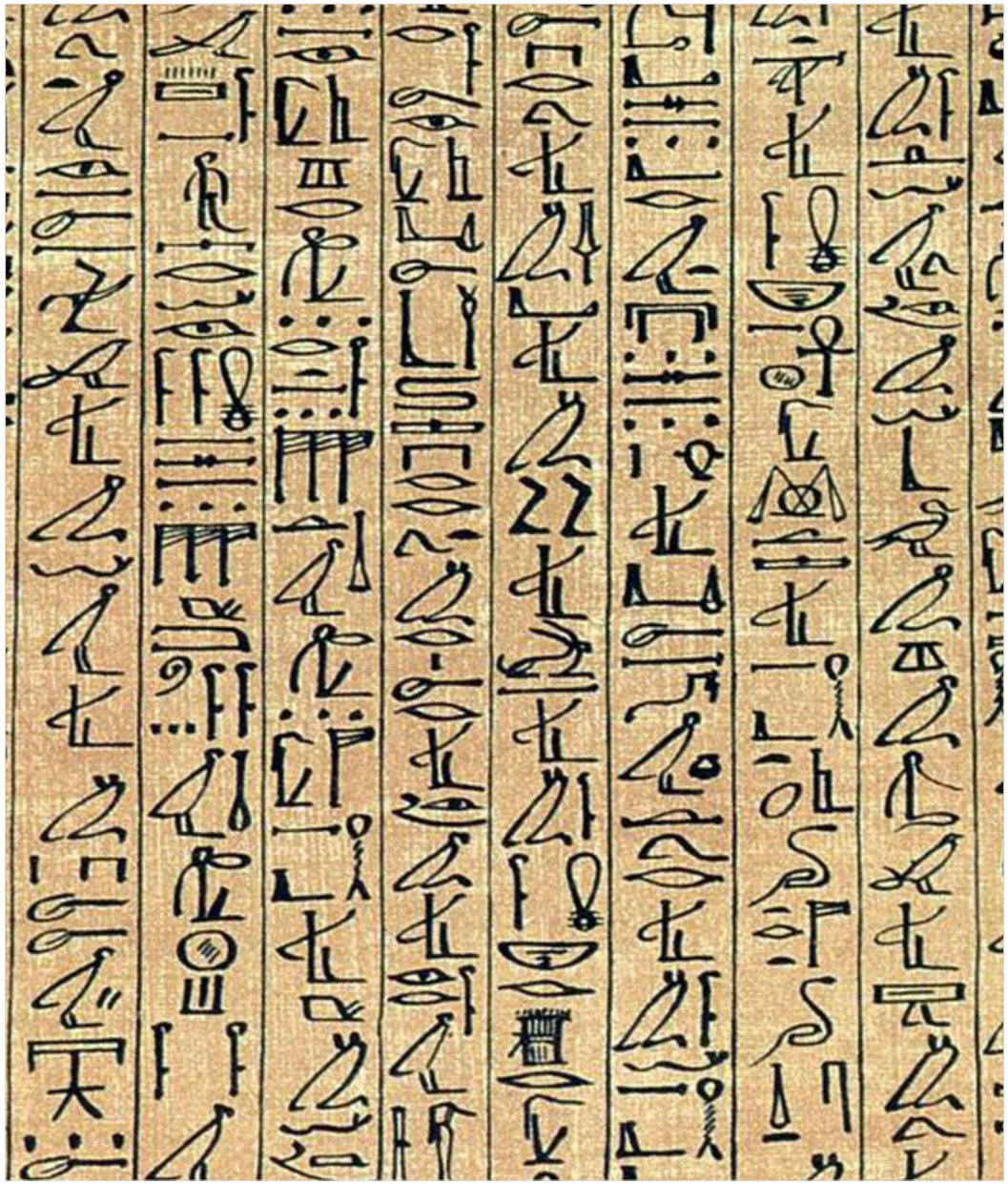

(Fig.2) Cursive Hiesoglyphs from the Papyrus of Ani, an example of the Egyptian Book of the Dead.

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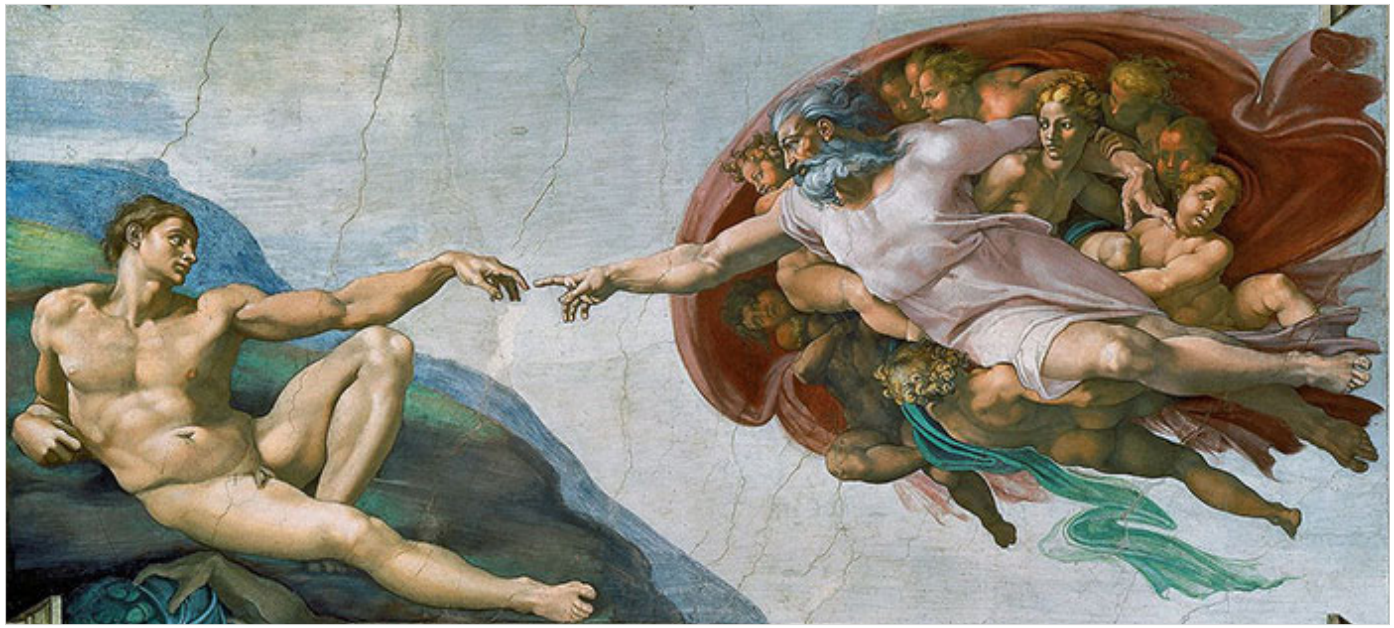
Sequences Through Paintings

Painting of "Adam and God" is known to be one of the earliest and largest painted sequential stories covering the entire ceiling of Sistine Chapel. The renowned Michelangelo solely created this.



(Fig.3) Adam and God – Creation of Adam, By Michelangelo.

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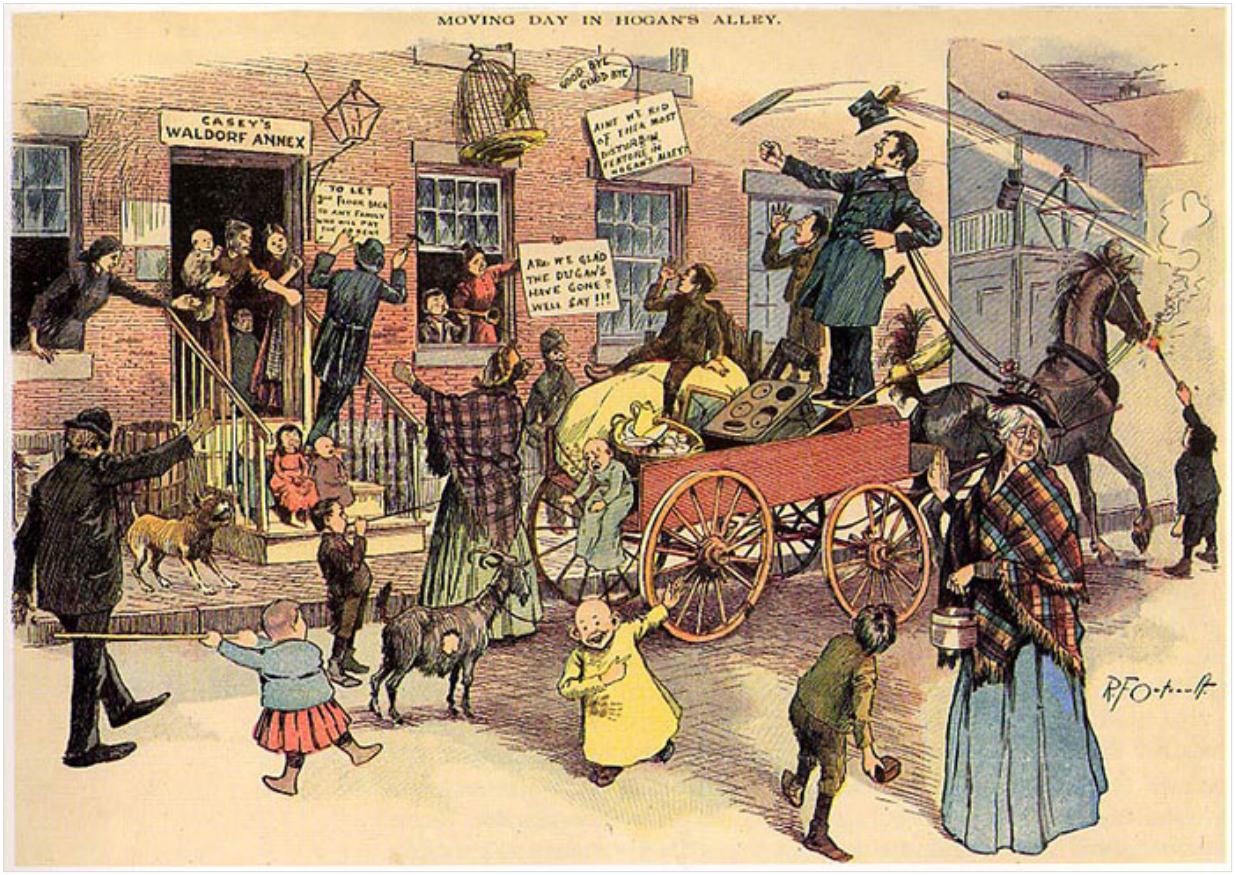
Early Publishing of Sequential Art

After the printing press was invented, the reinvention of sequential art took a big leap. Through printed newspapers and books, people began creating particular themed art such as politics, social life, satire of everyday life, etc. Thus it gave the birth of writing and dialogue in the images giving a different dimension to storytelling.


MOVING DAY IN HOGAN'S ALLEY.
CASEY'S WALDORF ANNEX
GOOD BYE GOOD BYE
AIN'T WE RID OF THEM MOST DISTURBIN FEATURE IN HOGAN'S ALLEY?
TO LET
ARE WE GLAD THE DUGAN'S HAVE GONE? WELL SAY !!!

(Fig.4) Yellow kid in Hogan's Alley Comic Strip (pub. 1896).

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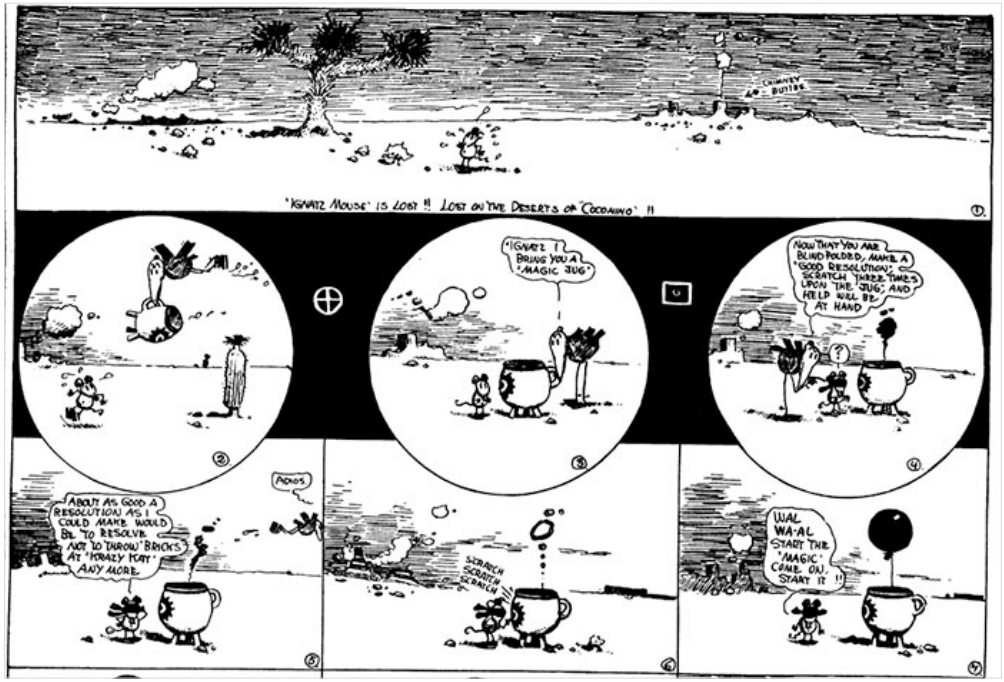
'IGNATZ MOUSE' IS LOST !! LOST ON THE DESERTS OF 'COCONINO' !!
'IGNATZ I BRING YOU A 'MAGIC JUG'
NOW THAT YOU ARE BLINDFOLDED, MAKE A 'GOOD RESOLUTION' SCRATCH THREE TIMES UPON THE 'JUG' AND HELP WILL BE AT HAND
ABOUT AS GOOD A RESOLUTION AS I COULD MAKE WOULD BE 'TO RESOLVE NOT TO THROW BRICKS AT 'KRAZY KAT' ANY MORE.
ADIOS
SCRATCH SCRATCH SCRATCH
WAL WA-AL START THE 'MAGIC' COME ON, START IT !!

(Fig.5) Part of Krazy Kat Comic Strip (pub. 1916).

In the present era of print media and communication, variety of styles of sequential art is practiced. Following are the different mediums practiced regularly:

- Comic Books
- Graphic Novels
- Cartoons
- Comic Strips
- Manga
- Children's Book
- Storyboard
- Web Comics
- Motion Comics
- Animated Comics

For further reading on the history of sequential art and comics in general, links are provided in the reference section.

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Key Fundamentals

To get started into comic book or graphic novel, there are certain aspects, which are essential to be aware about. These topics act as a backbone to which sequential art depend upon.

• **Writing**
Words have been telling stories for many centuries and is still being practiced without any imagery involved. But in the field of sequential art, such as comics, it also has a vital role to play, with the interlacing of images. The relationship of words and images is such that of mind and heart, that is its crucial to have a perfect balance between the two. Some instances can also be communicated with the images, where as in other times it can't be conveyed without texts.

So the writing and illustrations should work so well that the reader should find it effortless to jump from one panel to the other.

TM
CHACHA CHAUDHARY
PRAN
YOU HAVE NEVER BOUGHT JEWELLERY TO ME!
IT IS BECAUSE I LOVE YOU SO MUCH!
WHAT?
SOME OUTLAW WOULD KILL YOU AND TAKE AWAY JEWELS!
YOUR EXCUSE WOULD NOT WORK!! AM GOING TO MY MOTHER!
CHACHAJI! WHAT TO DO NOW?
SABU! NOW WE'LL ROAM FREELY! THERE WOULD BE NO ONE WHO WOULD NAG US! TROUBLE IS GONE!
www.pran.in
TROUBLE IS NOT YET GONE, BUT COMING BACK IN DOUBLE!
YOU CHIDED MY LITTLE DAUGHTER?
© PRAN'S FEATURES
GO, AND EARN SOMETHING! TILL THEN I'LL REMAIN HERE!
854.

(Fig.1) Chacha Chaudary Comics, By Pran Kumar Sharma (1969).

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...HOW MUCH TIME DO I HAVE?...WHAT KIND OF HELP WILL THE CIA GIVE...
I FIGURE YOU HAVE A 48-HOUR HEAD-START ON THEIR KGB...ACTUALLY, SHE CONTACTED US...NADIA WANTS YOU TO COME GET HER...YOU'RE BOOKED ON THE NOON CONCORD!
...HERE'S YOUR RETURN TICKETS... SORRY, THAT'S IT!! WE'RE IN AN ELECTION TIME...NO ONE STICKS HIS NECK OUT...TOO SENSITIVE...SEE?
YEAH! THANKS A LOT!
...AND MY FELLOW AMERICANS, I CAN ONLY STAND ON MY RECORD
...IN THE FOUR YEARS I HAVE BEEN IN OFFICE WE HAVE LED THIS NATION OUT OF ECONOMIC MESS TO REAL GROWTH IN...
IF I AM RE ELECTED, I PLEDGE TO....
ELECT

(Fig.2) Comic Page from Comics and Sequential Art, by Will Eisner.

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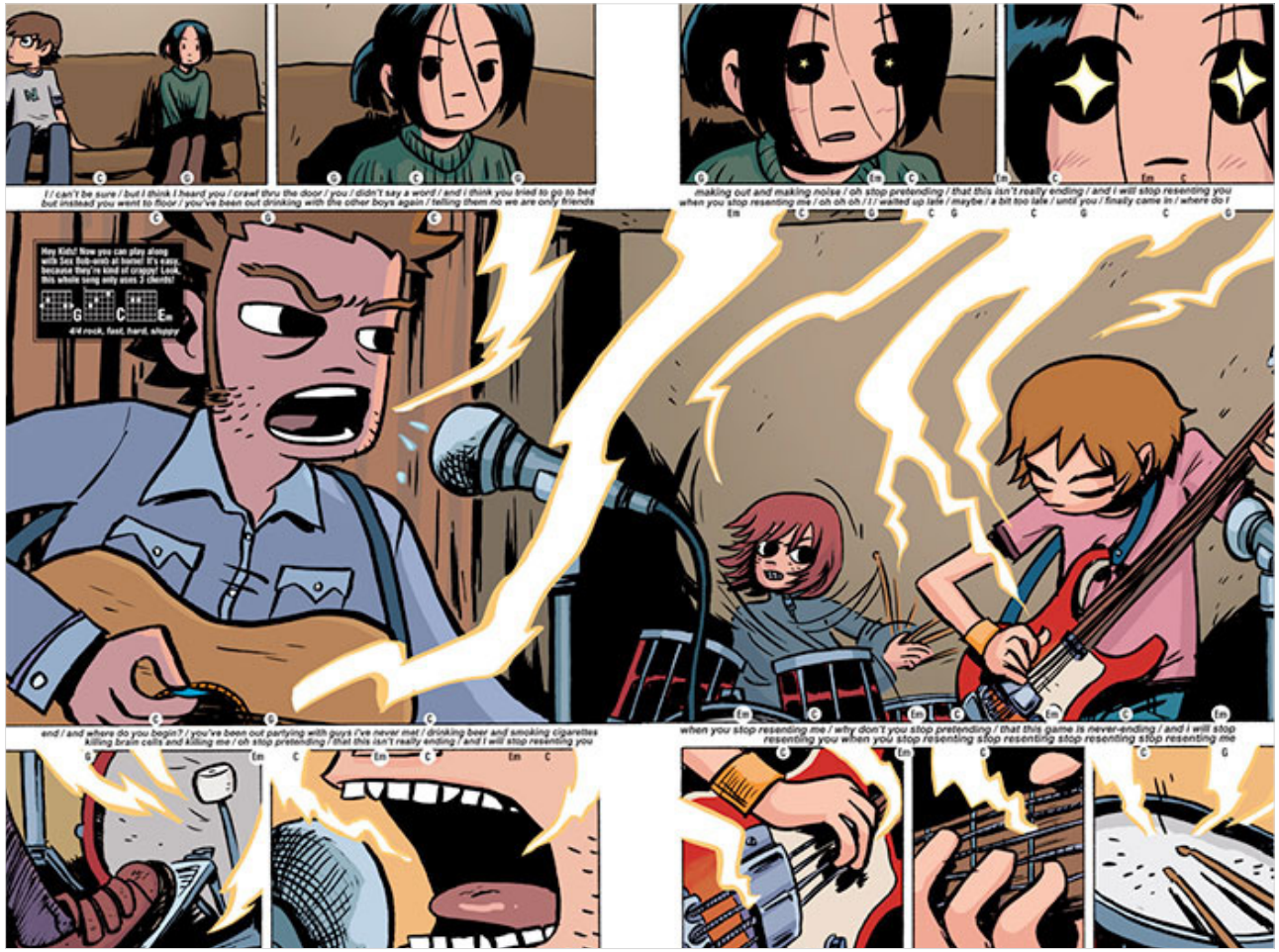
• **Image**

Creating pictures to fill the frames and bring life to the story/ idea constitutes this section. Comics communicate through the placement of words and images. Here, the real artistic skills come to play where the artist actually draws out their idea.

Irrelevant of what kind of style is used, it's a crucial process to know which drawing will suit best to convey the story. Remembering that too much imagery can also be a disadvantage, telling of the story should have a limited number of drawings for better pacing.



(Fig.3) Page from Scott Pilgrim- Volume 1, By Bryan Lee O'Malley.

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Drawing the images almost always deals with expression of characters, so posing and placement of characters should also be effectively scrutinized for the reader to understand the message as clear as possible, and not wasting any time.

Below, for example, the images are places in a way where words are least required and the story/situation is conveyed:

(Fig.4) Image, Comics and Sequential Art, by Will Eisner.

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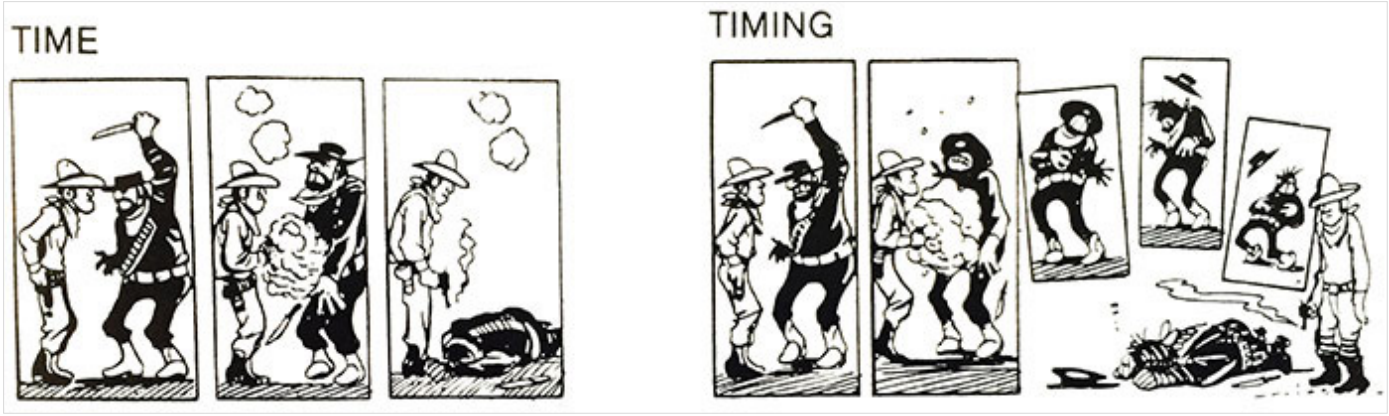
• **Timing**
The decision making of which moment or frame should be included, is a crucial process, and is of great priority. This procedure is basically a planning stage where a story's events are broken down to more parts to understand which moments are required and which can be left out. The key is to make the whole story compact and up to the exact frames only. This enhances the quality of the comic, as not all moments are relevant.

Every frame of the illustration/image conveys a moment in time of the story. Thus correct paneling is the fundamental to this art. These decisions are finalized mainly in the planning stage to understand the rhythm of the storytelling.



(Fig.5) Example from Comics and Sequential Art, By Will Eisner.

From the above example, we can understand more clearly understand the power of good timing in a comic. The first shows a simple action whose result is immediate... in seconds, whereas the second set shows the same but the result frame is only extended to enhance emotion.

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IF...IF HE WAS..uhp.. DEAD... AND SOMEONE SAW ME STEPPIN' OVER HIS BODY... THEY MIGHT THINK I K-KILLED HIM ...
..HE'S STILL THERE... HE HASN'T EVEN TURNED OVER... BET HE'S DEAD... DRUNKS USUALLY TWITCH OR TURN OVER OR SOMETHING... MAYBE I SHOULD CALL THE COPS...
NAH... BETTER MIND MY OWN BUSINESS..BEST KEEP OUTTA THINGS THAT DON'T CONCERN ME... YEAH... IT AIN'T MY FAULT HE GOT KILLED! ..YAWWN... CLICK
YAWN
PLOOP
CREAK CREAK
HE'S STILL THERE...NO ONE'S FOUND HIM YET... LOOKS LIKE HE WAS PUSHED OUTTA A WINDOW...
IT COULDA BEEN THIS WINDOW! HE'S DIRECTLY BELOW M-MY WINDOW!
THE LIGHTS... GOTTA SEE..MAYBE SOMETHIN' HAPPENED WHILE I WAS OUT... IF THE COPS FIND ANYTHING IN MY ROOM, THEY'LL FRAME ME SURE!
THUMP
CRASH
EEEYOW!

(Fig.6) Comic page, by Will Eisner.

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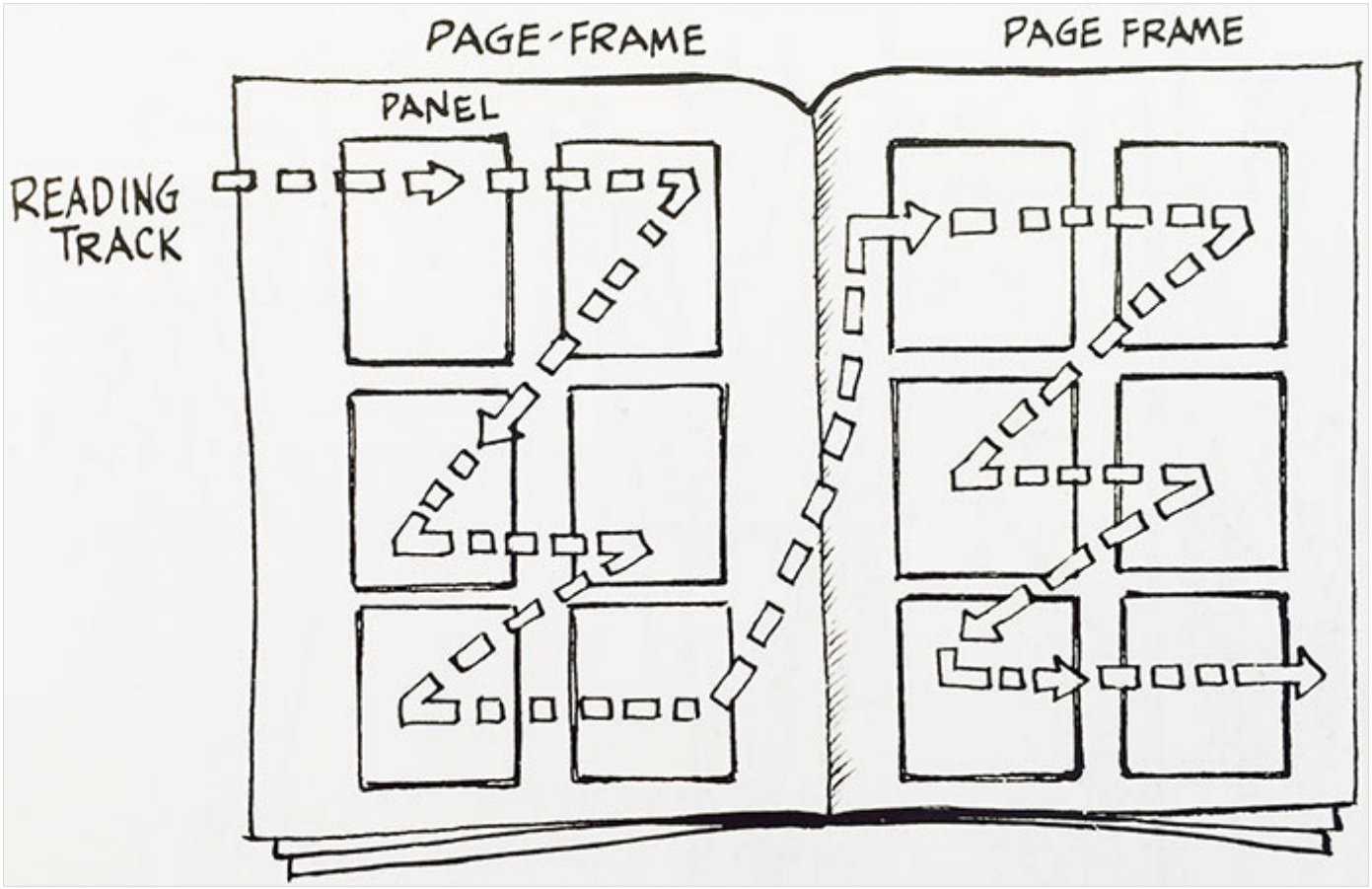
• **Framing**
Sequential art tells a story through multiple panels. Every comic book/ strip has some kind of narrative flow where it captures the events in framed or unframed sequences. This is quite similar to choosing the appropriate camera angle in film or photography.

Framing of the panels is very vital, as the artist needs to guide the reader to the exact required point of interest. Since we should not want the reader to wonder about, the artist should arrange the frames eloquently enough to take control for the reader.



(Fig.7) Image, Comics and Sequential Art, Will Eisner.

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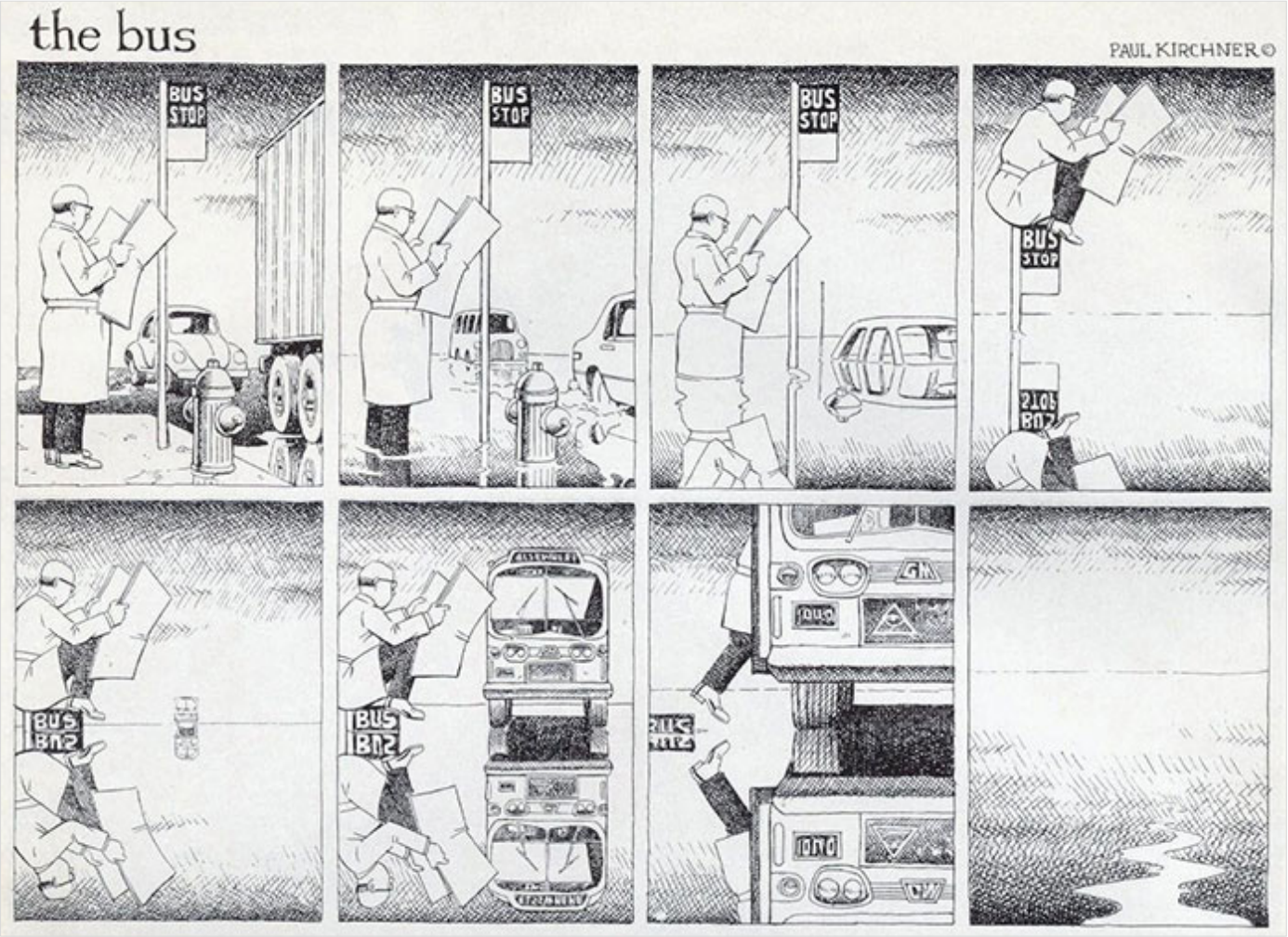

(Fig.8) The bus, By Paul Kirchner (1987).

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Materials Used

Materials used for Comic strips/ Graphic novels:
Any illustrator, comics or graphic novel artist need tools create their work. Due to the technological advancements, it has pushed the medium of sequential arts to a whole different level. Nevertheless, here are some primary traditional tools used:

Pencils and Erasers
The classic wooden pencils are widely used in drawing. But there are various graded of pencils out there differing in hardness, lightness and softness. The HB, H graded and B graded pencils are some options to choose from according to the artist's preference.

The mechanical pencils are also another alternative artists use for their layouts. Experimenting with different options will help find the best one.

Eraser is also a valuable tool while the drafting is being made. Any eraser will do, but there are some different types also found in the market. So experiment and look the best suited for the job.

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Pens

There are various kinds of pens to choose from. There are fine tip pigma pens, which have different tip thickness. The dip pens and crow quills, such that of speedball are also used by artist for the fineness. Black thick markers and alcohol markers are also much in use by artists.

Mreron No. 03 Fine Liner Pen | Crow Quill Pen | Fat Marker Pen | Copic Borad and FineTip Marker

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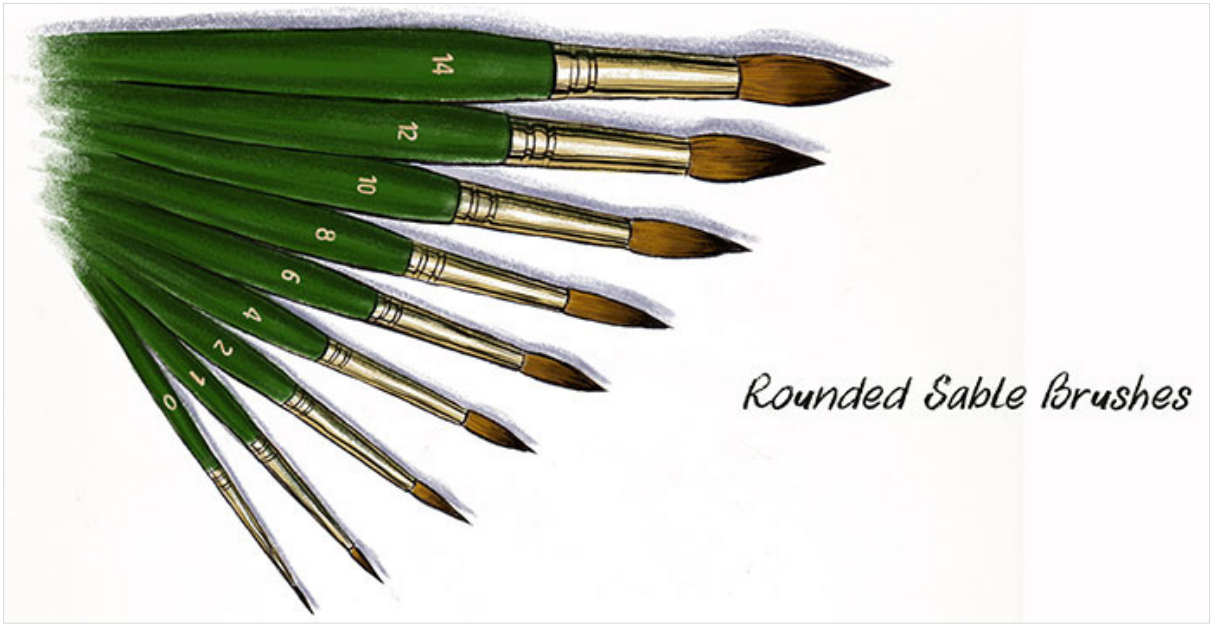
Brushes
The sable brushes series are commonly used among artists, which are graded from 0 to 8-10 sizes. So depending on the type of inking, you can try out with different brands and sizes, to find the best fit your work. Pens having a brush tip are also another option, where the ink is put on a cartridge. Some Japanese pens have such types of brush pens.



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Inks

The most common, the black India inks are widely used but comic book artists. But you can experiment with other black inks brands as well, which suits the work you are doing.

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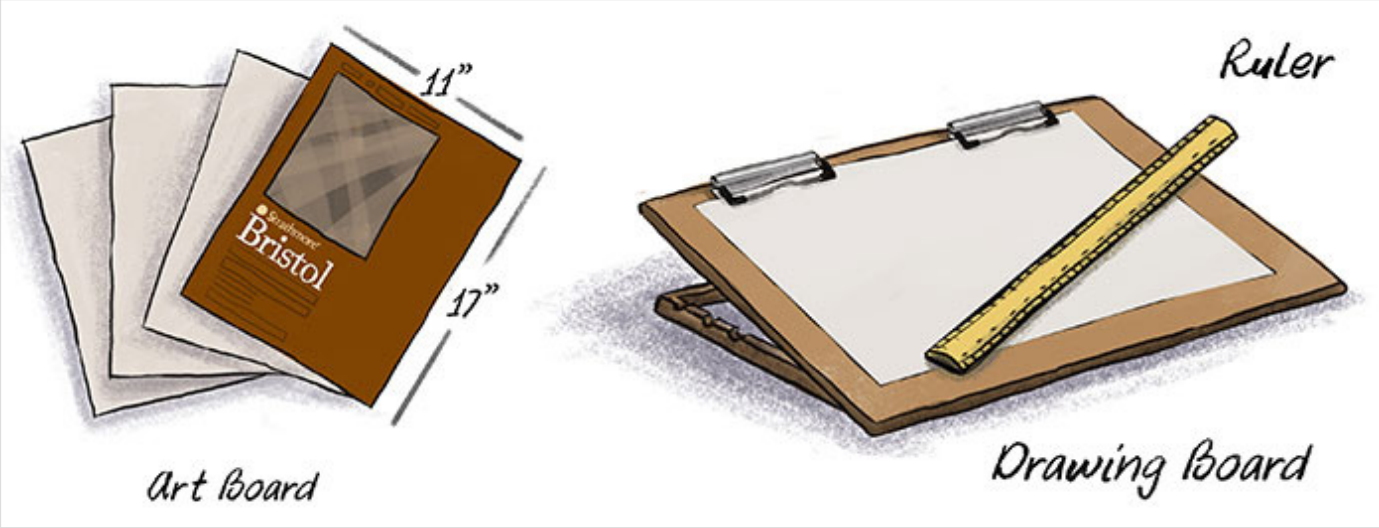
Art Board
Art board is known to be the illustration paper on which the final comics/ graphic novel pages are made. These are usually two- ply Bristol board, with size of 11 x 17 inches. There is even smooth or rough finish in the market, and many brands are available to buy from.

Drawing Board
Drawing board is a flat board, which supports to put your art board at any angle according to the artist's preference. It is suggested not to draw keeping flat on the table as it distorts the drawing.

Rulers
A transparent raised edge rulers are most comfortable as in case it keeps the ink from flowing and transparency helps in see under it.



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Technological Requirements

Computers and other machines have become very critical tools for our day-to-day use, and it's the same while working on comics as well. So here are some necessary requirements while working:

Computer
Computers play a very important role in fine-tuning the art made from pen, pencil or brush, and sending the final product to whomever necessary. It is also used on making the artwork from scratch if the artist chooses that process.

Scanner
Pencilers and inkers use scanners to digitize their work and doing further edit on the computer. Its necessary to get out the best quality digitally and sender it to other necessary people would also be very easy.

Printer
Checking out your artwork at the print size helps you see whether or not the overall work looks good. Thus a printer is a useful tool to have.

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Digital Drawing Tablet

The tablet, which accompanies a digital pen, is a very handy tool to directly draw your work in the computer software. This alternative is used to draw everything from scratch or even for coloring purposes and final editing of your illustrations. The most popularly used brand in the market is the Wacom, and there are variety of tablet sizes to choose from, which best suits the artist's work.

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Internet

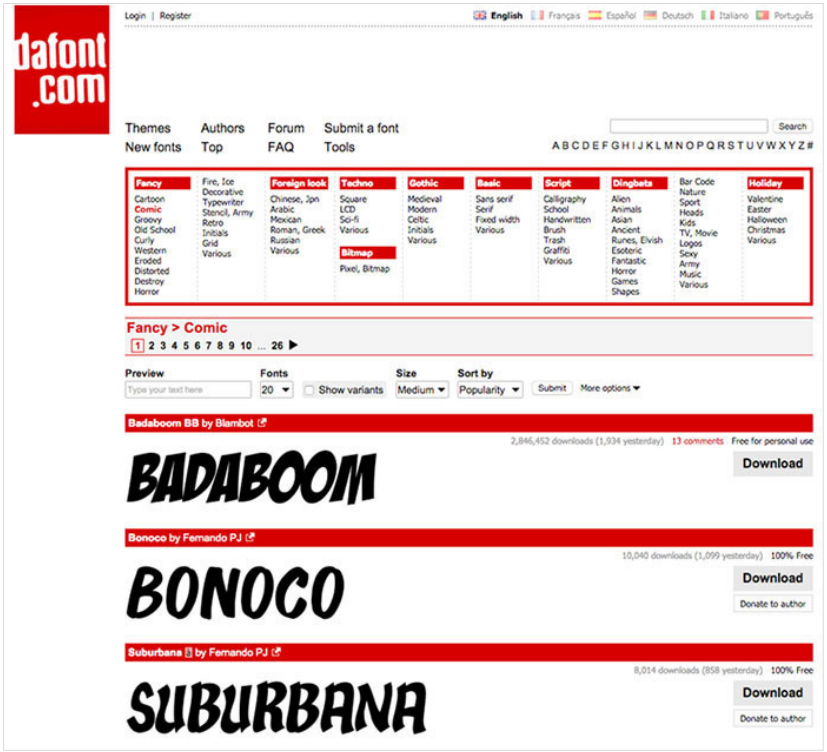
A good Internet connection is very much necessary for artists involved with comic illustrations and graphic novels, as exchange of files and information is continuously required among multiple people such as artists, editors, clients etc.

Internet is also a great source of any reference needed for an illustration project. Many artists archive more and more collection of references through the web whenever they can.

Lettering Fonts

Instead of lettering and making sound effects by hand, there are various kinds of comic book fonts available in the Internet, which can be put to good use digitally, along with other effects can also be easily created in it.

Below are some websites who provide free as well as paid fonts for comic purposes. Their libraries have a wide range of fonts, catering to any style that may be required.



(Fig.3) Webpage excerpt from Font website – www.dafont.com.

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Source:
https://www.dsource.in/course/sequential-storytelling/technological-requirements

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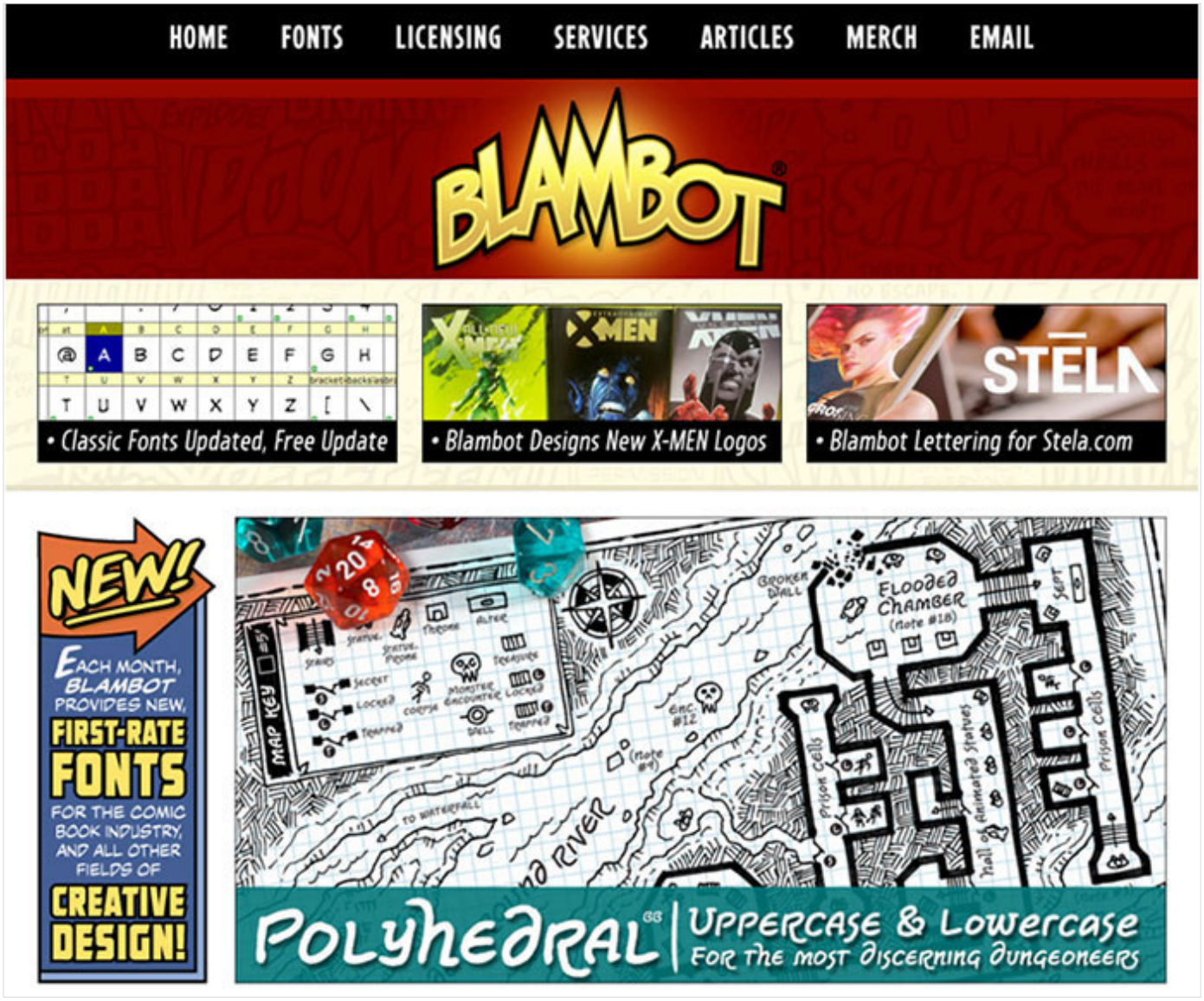

(Fig.4) Webpage excerpt from Font website – http://www.blambot.com/.

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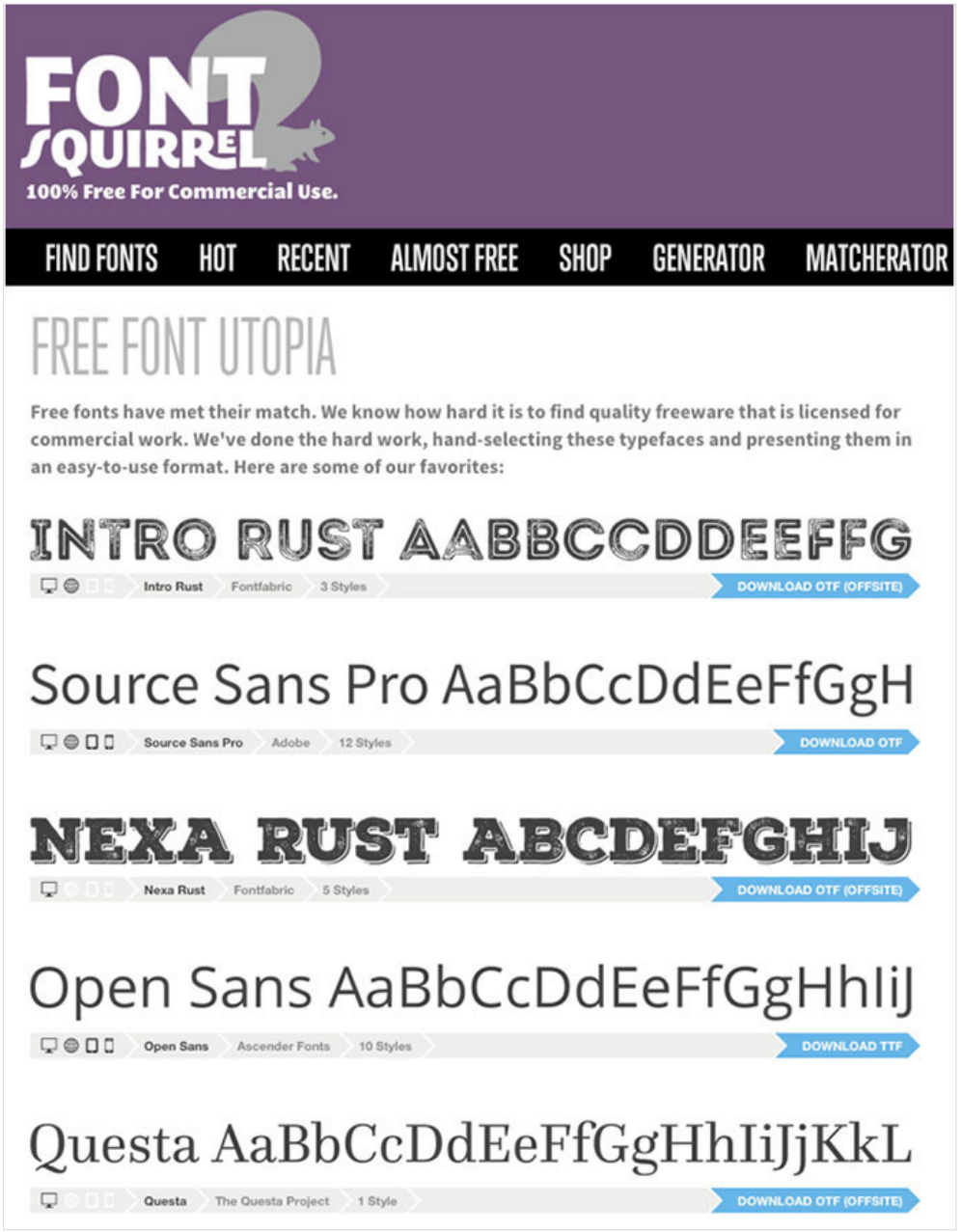

(Fig.5) Webpage excerpt from Font website – http://www.fontsquirrel.com/.

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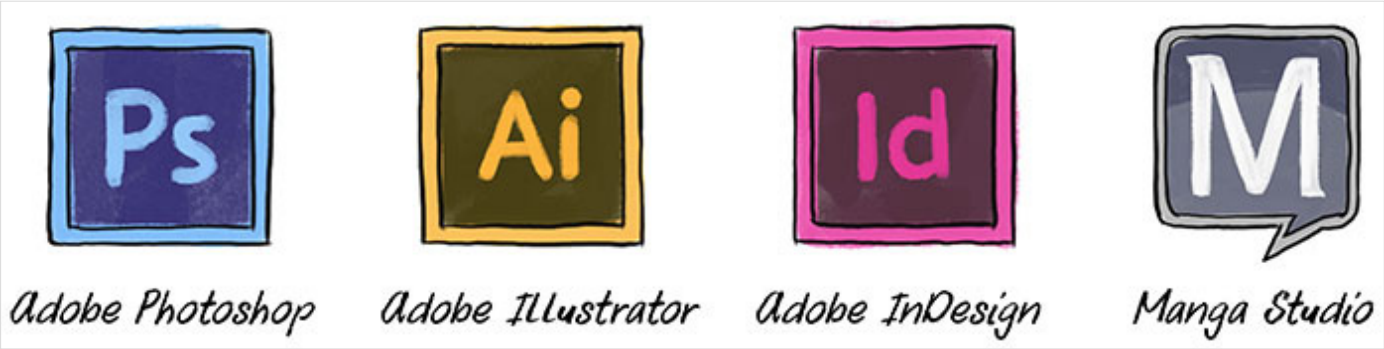
Software

Computer software is one of the key important medium for artists, and just installing them in the PC is not enough but learning its useful tools should also be given ample time. Thus using its full functionality needs to be learnt for best use. Some of widely common used software programs in the field of Comics and illustrations are:



- Adobe Photoshop
- Adobe Illustrator/ InDesign
- Manga Studio

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Getting Your Work Published

Print Syndication:
Syndication has become a big contributor to the comic strip business. Comic strips are distributed to our local newspapers through companies called **syndicates**. Famous comic strips such as *Peanuts, Dennis the menace, Garfield*, etc. are all syndicated. These syndicate companies makes it possible distribute a comic strip to hundreds or thousands newspapers where the artist have to involve the least bit of effort.

The downside for this process is that syndicates sort through literally thousands of comic strip ideas to launch just 3-4 in the coming year.

Publishing free on the Web - Web Comics:
The exposure of art on the web has increased phenomenally in this decade. With the easy access of Internet to many people around the globe, it is very helpful for artists to put their work online and showcase their work for free. Thus instead of looking for syndication on newspapers and magazines, independent artists publish their work as web-comics for anyone having access of the Internet.

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(Fig.1) Peanuts daily comic Strip - 2/7/1988
https://schulzmuseum.org/collections/#/peanuts-cartoon-strip-collection

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Current Styles

Sequential art in modern times have evolved to the computer and the digital era. The current generation is engulfed in the digital technological advancements, so its no surprise the sequential art form has also reinvented itself to the ongoing trends.

The digital version of the traditional hardcopy comic books, popularly known as web comics are much in business and is easier accessible to the consumers. Some other latest styles coming on trend for comics are: Web-comics, Motion and Animated Comics.

(Fig.1) Sepra comics, online comics website.

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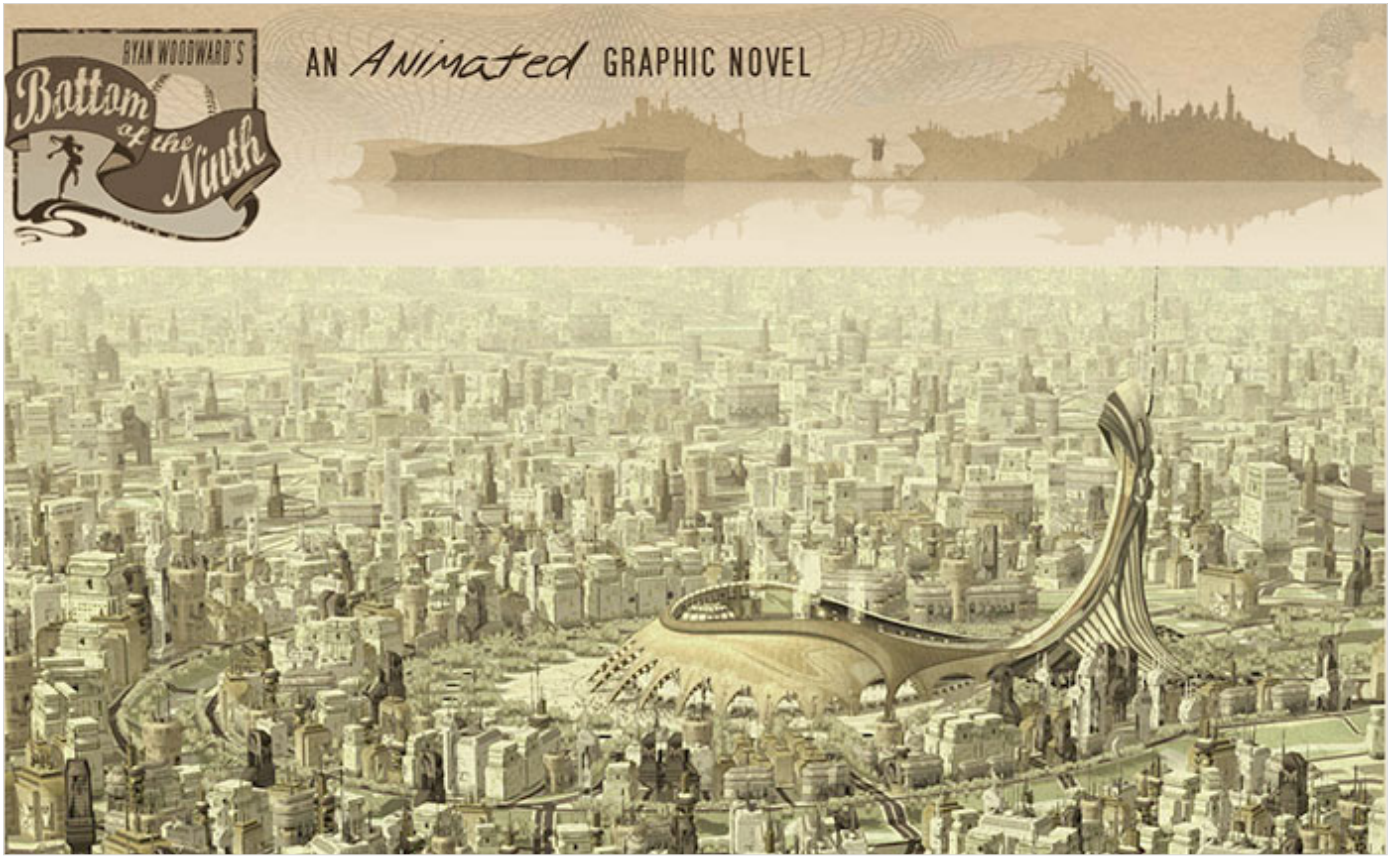
Some examples of different styles of Web-Comics can be found in the following link:
http://spera-comic.com/onlinecomics/onlinecomics.html

Artist and animator Ryan Woodward has in the recent years created one of the first animated graphic novels, primarily for the Ipad format.



(Fig.2) Bottom of the Ninth, an Animated Graphic Novel, By Ryan Woodward.

To read and experience the computer version of the Animated Graphic Novel, here's an online browser link:
http://www.bottom-of-the-ninth.com/?page_id=1811

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http://imgur.com/a/nu4AB

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This documentation was done by Pranisha Shrestha at IDC, IIT Bombay.

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